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SUBJECT: UNDEF: CLUB DE MADRID PROMOTES ARAB DEMOCRATIC
DIALOGUE

REF: STATE 19781

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: The Spain-based NGO Club de Madrid is using UN Democracy Fund (UNDEF) funding to help fund a project aimed at promoting freedom of association in several key Arab nations, the "Dialogue on Democratic Values in the Arab World." The Club de Madrid is pleased with its relationship and interactions with UNDEF and has been amazed with the ability of the fund to vet and approve 125 grants in its first year. The Club de Madrid has already completed one UNDEF-funded leadership visit to Morocco and will complete the second, to Jordan, before the end of April. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Poloff met with Milburn Line, Program Officer at the Club de Madrid, to discuss the Club's UNDEF-funded project, "Dialogue on Democratic Values in the Arab World", on March 30. The Club de Madrid is a five-year-old governance NGO whose members (currently 66 strong) are former heads of state or heads of government of democratic nations, by invitation only. Notable members include former President Bill Clinton, former Prime Minister Kim Campbell (Canada), former President Felipe Gonzalez (Spain) and former President Mary Robinson (Ireland). While founded in 2002, the Club has really only had operational capacity for the past three years. Line said that the high profile of the Club's members makes it a great tool for emphasizing multilateral consensus on important issues such as the need for increased freedoms in the Arab world.

//PROJECT OVERVIEW//

¶3. (U) Line told Poloff that the dialogue project is primarily funded by the European Commission (EC) and that UNDEF funding accounts for 20 percent of the total project budget. The two-year project identified six target nations in the Arab world to which Club members would travel for discussions with high-ranking government officials, civil society leaders and other stakeholders in an effort to promote freedom of association in these nations. The Club is using the 2007 UNDEF funding for programs in two target nations, Morocco and Jordan, while the EC funding will pay for work in Bahrain in 2007 and in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia in 2008. Line said the plan was to build momentum in more moderate nations in 2007 before tackling the tougher states in 2008. The Club contracts with local partners in each of the target nations for assistance with logistics, programming and contacts, but it principally capitalizes on the political cachet of its members and its connections in the Madrid diplomatic corps to gain audiences with high-ranking officials.

¶4. (U) The goal of the project is to establish the dialogue on freedom of association within each target nation and then attempt to parlay these initial dialogues with the key

nations into a future joint dialogue among these countries, which could be subsequently expanded to include other interested Arab nations. The Club counts on its fairly high-profile membership to provide the necessary access for serious dialogue at the decision-making level of these governments.

//MARCH 1 PROJECT LAUNCH//

¶5. (U) The Club de Madrid only officially launched the dialogue project with a kickoff planning meeting February 14-15 in Cairo, so Line said it was a little early for concrete results. Former Prime Minister of Sudan Sadig Al Mahdi led the meeting, along with local partners, the Bahrain Centre for National Studies, the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, and Moroccan NGO Maroc 2020. Al Mahdi then announced the project by writing a column in As Sharq Al Awsat, the most widely read daily newspaper in the Arab world, that discussed the lack of freedom of association in the Arab world.

//TRIP TO MOROCCO//

¶6. (U) Three other former heads of government, Abdul-Kareem Al-Eryani (Yemen), Felipe Gonzalez (Spain), and Petre Roman (Romania) led the Club's first survey mission to Morocco March 13-16, 2007. With the assistance of Maroc 2020, they met a large variety of government and civil society including ministers and female Members of Parliament. The mission focused on learning about recent democratic reforms in Morocco as well as identifying remaining challenges. The Club plans to return to Morocco in June 2007 to continue work.

//JORDAN TRIP IN APRIL//

¶7. (U) Line said that the next country the Club will survey is Jordan, April 16-19, and they expect to be received by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice. That delegation will be led by Al Mahdi, Kjell Magne Bondevik (Norway), and Valdis Birkas (Latvia).

//PLEASED WITH UNDEF//

¶8. (SBU) Line noted that UNDEF funding is only just now coming through, but he added that compared with requesting funds from the European Community, the UNDEF process was simple. He also praised the web-based proposal mechanism, saying that it was easy to use. He offered that the Club had applied for funding from DRL for this project as well but had not heard back in the end. He further offered that perhaps this was just as well, as U.S.-funded projects have tended to arouse greater suspicions in the Arab world than UN and European endeavors.

//ON SCHEDULE, ON BUDGET//

¶9. (U) Line told Poloff that the Club's project remained on schedule and on budget to address all six target nations within the two-year timeframe and to complete UNDEF-funded work in Morocco and Jordan within the first year.

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Aguirre